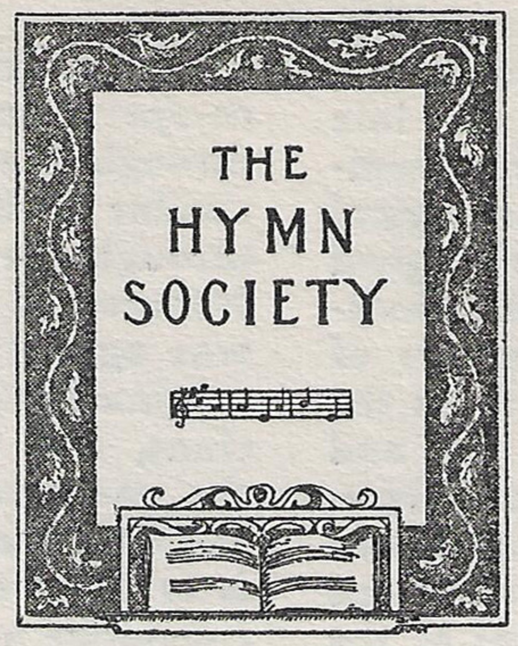

THE HYMN SOCIETY
OF AMERICA
ITS STORY AND PURPOSE

Organized in January, 1922, The Hymn Society was the fulfillment of an idea long cherished by a lover of church music, Miss Emily S. Perkins, who is now its corresponding secretary. While its membership is not large, it includes many of the foremost writers of hymns and hymn tunes, as well as hymn-book editors, in America.

The objects of the Society and its aims include among others the following: the use in worship of better Christian hymns and hymn tunes; the creation of renewed interest among congregations in hymn singing, by every possible means —instruction, demonstrations, festivals, etc.; the encouragement of the writing and publishing of hymns that express the temper of modern Christian life and thought, and also of hymn tunes of genuine musical value that are adapted to congregational singing; the collection of hymnic data, new and old, including source material from living writers on their own work; research and discussion in the field of hymnology, including the publication of important addresses made before the Society on hymnological subjects.

Membership is of three classes, active, associate and honorary. Only writers of hymns, composers of hymn tunes, hymn-book editors are eligible for active membership. Associate membership is open to those who are known to be in sympathy with the objectives of the Hymn Society. Honorary members may be elected in recognition of their preëminent distinction in the field of worship song. Applications for membership are endorsed by two active members, and are submitted to the membership committee, which passes upon the qualifications of the applicant. The dues of active and associate members are two dollars a year. Honorary members are exempt from dues.

The Society has always carried on a winter program of meetings, which includes addresses upon some theme of special interest, also general discussion and book reviews, besides the presentation of new hymns and hymn tunes. One or two public services have been held each year, addressed by leaders of Christian worship, such as Dr. Louis F. Benson, Dr. Robert Norwood, Dr. Walter Henry Hall, Dr. Wm. P. Merrill, Dr. James Moffatt, Dr. Karl Reiland, Dr. Howard Chandler Robbins, Dr. Augustus S. Steimle, Dr. George Stewart, et al. Meetings have been addressed by Dr. Wm. C. Covert, Dr. and Mrs. Clarence Dickinson, Dr. Edward S. Ninde, Dr. T. Tertius Noble, Alfred Hollins, Hugh Roberton, Bishop W. P. Thirkield, Augustus S. Newman, Dr. J. F. Ohl, Dr. Frank Mason North, Professor Waldo S. Pratt, Dr. John Finley Williamson and many other active members of the Society, including the presidents. Several prize contests have been conducted by the Society for hymns and hymn tunes, through the generosity of an anonymous friend who presented $1,000 in 1927 for the purpose. Among the prize winners were Miss May Rowland, Miss Lily Rendle and Rhys Thomas of England, John N. Burnham, Dr. David McKay Williams and Professor H. H. Tweedy of America. Besides the prize-winning manuscripts, many hymns and tunes have been produced by these contests which have already found publication in hymn books and pamphlets, and thus the writing of new hymns and tunes has been stimulated.

THE NEWMAN LIBRARY of hymnology, presented to the Hymn Society by the late Augustus S. Newman, one of its charter members, has been housed at Union Theological Seminary, New York City, through the good offices of the librarian, Dr. William W. Rockwell, and Dr. Clarence Dickinson, members of the Hymn Society. Here in a spacious room the cream of the Union Seminary hymn library and the Newman books are available on the shelves, with piano and study tables to assist students of hymnology in their research. Cases have been added to contain the manuscript archives of the Society, which are in the custody of Miss Ruth E. Messenger, Archivist.

The publications of the Society include five issues of the *Papers of the Hymn Society,* edited by Carl F. Price. They are as follows: 1. *The Hymns of John Bunyan,* by Louis F. Benson, D.D. 2. *The Religious Value of Hymns,* by William P. Merrill, D. D. 3. *The Praise of the Virgin in Early Latin Hymns,* by Ruth Ellis Messenger, Ph. D. 4. *The Significance of the Old French Psalter,* by Professor Waldo S. Pratt, L. H. D., Mus. D. 5. *Hymn Festival Programs,* with foreword by the Editor.

The Society has exerted considerable influence in several of the Protestant churches. Some of its members have conducted courses in hymnology in theological seminaries and schools of religious education. They are sharing in the issue of the great denominational hymnals and have contributed to the *Handbook to the Presbyterian Hymnal* (1935).

In 1932 the Society celebrated its tenth anniversary with a three day convention which included two great public services with dinners and other important meetings. It has now started the formation of chapters in other large metropolitan centers, where those qualified for membership in the Society can extend its field of action through local programs.

The latest definite project of the Hymn Society is the encouragement of Hymn Festivals throughout the country. A Hymn Festival is a service of worship, beautiful and dignified, given after careful planning and thorough preparation, in which hymns of the finest character, sung chiefly by the congregation, make up a large part of the service, and in which other hymnic material may be presented by the choir or choirs and by the organist. The service may be quite simple or it may be planned elaborately, but it should be an integrated service of worship with a definite theme and direction, and it should employ the hymn as an instrument for awakening a clearer consciousness of God, revealing his nature, according him praise and adoration and discovering his will for mankind.

In this endeavor the Society has secured the co-operation, on the one hand, of ministers through the Federal Council of Churches and similar bodies, and on the other, of organists through the American Guild of Organists. In conferences with a committee of the A. G. O. it was agreed that the movement would naturally originate with organists and other church musicians, and that they would immediately enlist the co-operation of their own ministers. This has happened already in many places. The plan is to carry out the recommendations of the joint committee as follows:

I. The use of a definite Sunday on which festival services of hymns may be held in the churches served by our members. The date selected is the Sunday nearest St. Cecilia's Day, which this year is November 22, 1936.

II. Preparation of material for the guidance of organists in planning such a festival. The Society has printed a leaflet giving five festival programs of the more elaborate type. Simpler suggestive orders of service are now in preparation. It is further proposed to issue a list of hymnic material for organists and choirmasters, including descants and choral preludes, etc., for the organ.

III. Conferences on congregational singing.

IV. Publication of articles in the religious and organ magazines.

The success of the movement will depend on the individual ministers, organists and directors of church and church school music, who must formulate each step of the plan and carry out its purpose. The Hymn Society invites the co-operation of chapters of the A. G. O. through the holding of services sponsored by them, of individual organists in their own churches and of the increasing company of ministers who have been waiting for such a positive move on the part of church musicians.

Further information about the general work of the Society may be secured from Miss Emily S. Perkins, corresponding secretary, Riverdale-on-Hudson, New York. Publications of the Society may be obtained by applying to Mr. John Barnes Platt, treasurer, 67 West 44th Street, New York. For further particulars about the Hymn Festivals please consult Mr. Reginald L. McAll, chairman of the Hymn Festival committee, 2268 Sedgwick Avenue, New York. Those desiring to apply for membership in the Society should write to Miss Perkins.